Department of Public Utilities
25 Water Plant Road | Troy NY 12182

Lead Service Lines
Frequently Asked Questions

What is Lead?

Lead is a common naturally occurring metallic element that can be found in air, soil, and water. It is also a powerful toxin that is harmful to human health. Lead was commonly used in gasoline and paint until the 1970s and is still sometimes found in products such as ceramics, batteries, ammunition, and cosmetics. Lead was used for centuries in plumbing because of its pliability and resistance to leaks; in fact, lead's chemical symbol, Pb, is derived from the Latin word for plumbing.

In 1986, U.S. Congress amended the Safe Drinking Water Act to prohibit the use of pipes, solder or flux that were not "lead free." At the time "lead free" was defined as solder and flux with no more than .2% lead and pipes with no more than 8%. In 2014, the maximum allowable lead content was reduced from not more than 8% to not more than a weighted average of 0.25% of the wetted surface of pipes, pipe fittings, plumbing fittings, and fixtures.

Why is lead a health risk?

Lead is a toxic metal that can cause immediate health effects at high doses and long term health effects if it builds up in the body over many years. Lead can cause brain and kidney damage in addition to effects on the blood and vitamin D metabolism.

Pregnant women and young children are particularly vulnerable because the physical and behavioral effects of lead occur at lower exposure levels in children than in adults. In children, low levels of exposure have been linked to central and peripheral nervous system damage, learning disabilities, shorter stature, impaired hearing, and impaired formation and function of blood cells. While people are most commonly exposed to lead through paint, soil and dust, U.S. EPA estimates infants who consume mostly mixed formula can receive 40% to 60% of their exposure to lead from drinking water.

How much lead in water is too much?

Lead can be harmful even at very low levels and can accumulate in our bodies over time, so wherever possible steps should be taken to reduce or eliminate your household's exposure. While risks vary based on individual circumstances and the amount of water consumed, no concentration of lead is considered "safe." Households with pregnant women, infants, or young children are most vulnerable to the harmful effects of lead at low levels.

How does lead get into drinking water?

Lead is almost never present when water flows from the treatment facility, nor is it present in the water mains running beneath the streets. However, in some older homes lead may be present in the pipe connecting the home to the water system – known as a service line -- or in the home plumbing. Lead in service pipes, plumbing or fixtures can dissolve, or particles can break off into water and end up at the tap.

Is water the only source of lead in homes and businesses?

No. In fact, lead in drinking water generally represents only about 20% of total exposure, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. However, drinking water can account for more than half of lead exposure in children because of their lower body weight. Additionally, because no level of lead is considered safe, completely eliminating potential sources of lead is strongly advised.

Are there lead service lines in Troy?

Lead was used as water service line material in Troy until the 1940s, predominantly in the section of service line located between the water main, which is typically located in the street, and the curb stop, which is typically located near the sidewalk. Many times, different materials were used for a single service. For example, the material used for the section of service line located between the water main and curb stop may be different than the material used for the section of service line located between the curb stop and the house.

Troy is trying to identify lead services in our distribution system and to update our records accordingly. Gathering information on where lead services are located within the City will help with our effort to eventually replace lead service lines. Please assist our effort to locate and eliminate lead services by submitting information on your service line at www.troyny.gov/lead. The information submitted will only be used to create an inventory to assist in program development.

What does Troy do to protect my household from lead?

To prevent lead from dissolving into water from lead service lines or home plumbing, Troy adjusts the water's chemistry at the treatment plant. This process is known as corrosion control. We sample water at homes considered to be high risk to ensure our corrosion control remains effective. Although corrosion control can reduce risks, the best way to assure your home is safe from lead exposure through water is to remove the potential sources of lead.

How do I know if my home has a lead service line or lead plumbing?

You can hire a certified plumber or contact Troy to inspect both your service line and other materials in contact with your drinking water. In the Troy system, lead service lines are mostly in homes constructed before the 1940s.

You may be able to determine on your own if your service line is made of lead. Service lines typically enter the home in the basement or crawl space. If the pipe is lead, it will have a dull finish that shines brightly when scratched with a key or coin. Using a magnet can also help you identify a lead pipe, because even a strong magnet will not cling to lead. Detailed instructions, as well as a form to submit your results, can be found at www.troyny.gov/lead.

How do I know whether my drinking water contains lead?

Because it is colorless and tasteless, lead is not readily apparent in water. In fact, the only way to know for certain whether your drinking water contains lead is to have your water tested by a certified laboratory. Troy has the ability to test a limited amount of water services for the presence of lead at no cost to you. While this service is provided free of charge, the homeowner or tenant must be responsible for ensuring that the proper procedure is followed. If you wish to take advantage of this free testing, please contact our Water Laboratory at (518) 237-0343.

What can I do to reduce or eliminate lead from my drinking water?

The best way to remove risks of lead in water is to completely replace all sources of lead. But there are also steps you can take right away to reduce lead levels in your water.

Run the Tap Before Use – Lead levels are likely at their highest when water has been sitting in the pipe for several hours. Clear this water from your pipes by running the cold water for several minutes. This allows you to draw fresh water from the main. You can use the spent water on house plants or to flush toilets.

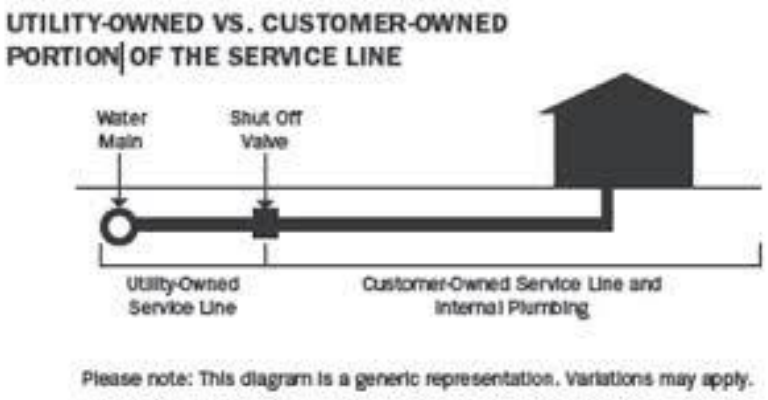
Clean Aerators – Aerators are small attachments at the tips of faucets which regulate the flow of water. They can accumulate small particles of lead in their screens. It's a good idea to remove your aerators at least monthly and clean them out.

Use Cold Water for Cooking and Drinking – Always cook and prepare baby formula with cold water, because hot water dissolves lead more quickly, resulting in higher levels in water.

Filter the Water – Many home water filters are effective at removing lead. If you purchase a filter, make sure it is certified for lead removal and that you maintain it properly. Find out more on filter certification at www.nsf.org.

Who owns the lead service line?

Lead service lines are owned by Troy up to the curb stop, or shut off, and the rest of the line from curb stop to the meter in the home is owned by the property owner. Replacing the entire lead service line is therefore a shared responsibility between Troy and each customer. If you wish to change out the lead service line, this work must be coordinated with Troy; otherwise you will have a partial lead service line (PLSL).



A PLSL is when either portion of the service line—either the public portion from water main to curb stop, or the private portion from the curb stop to the meter—is lead, while the other portion is non-lead. Past studies have indicated that PLSL replacements can potentially increase lead levels in drinking water within an individual home as the pipe material can be disrupted during the repair. If you have replaced your portion of a lead service line please contact the Troy Department of Public Utilities so we can schedule the replacement of the city owned portion in the near future at our expense.

Does Troy plan to replace lead service lines?

Troy is developing a Lead Service Replacement Program and hoping to provide opportunities for grants. In 2019, Troy received $500,000 grant from the Department of Health for lead service replacement. These funds are anticipated to be used for this program.